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Summary of Northern Wisconsin Center Survey

Nationwide and in Wisconsin, public policy is changing direction on how people with developmental disabilities are served and supported. This public policy shift is based on the belief that, with proper supports, people with developmental disabilities can live in their own homes and experience an improved quality of life and life choices.

The proposal to phase out long-term care at the Northern Wisconsin Center (NWC) was made in the 2003-05 biennial budget and reflected the change in national public policy about how best to support persons with developmental disabilities. During the NWC downsizing process, many concerns were raised about the relocation process, guardian involvement and health and safety of the relocated individuals in their community living settings.

After completing the relocation process, the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) with funding support from the Wisconsin Council on Development Disabilities (WCDD) facilitated a survey through APS Healthcare to evaluate the process, services and results of the relocation program. APS Healthcare is an independent contractor that has previously worked with DHFS in the Family Care program and was familiar with Wisconsin county system.

APS conducted a mail and telephone survey to the guardians of the 133 NWC wards that were relocated. Seventy-six percent of the recipients completed the survey. The survey was divided into two areas, reaction to the relocation process and satisfaction with the community living arrangements. The survey also included an open-ended segment for comments on process improvement.

Highlights from the survey include:

Relocation process

- 92% of the guardians indicated that someone from the county was available to answer questions about moving into the community.
- 95% of the guardians specified that relocation information was provided in a timely manner.
- 94% of the guardians agreed that they were adequately involved in the planning process to move their ward into the community.

Community Living Arrangements

- 95% of the guardians agreed that their ward is living in a safe place.
- 92% of the guardians indicated that their ward receives adequate health care tailored to his/her needs in the community.
- 96% of the guardians felt well informed about their wards' activities and adequately involved in their wards' services and supports planning.

In conclusion, the guardians had an overall positive reaction to the relocation effort at NWC. The survey found that the NWC staff, county staffs and community provider staffs worked well together at placing the individuals into the community. The majority of the guardians agree that their ward's overall happiness is better in the community living arrangements than before the relocation process. The Community Integration Program, along with the DHFS will use these results to help improve and simplify any future relocation processes.

For the complete survey visit: http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/disabilities/dd_ctrs/index.htm